

## **Sinai (1027 words):**

Since the Paleolithic period (700,000–5,500 BCE) to the present, the Sinai Peninsula has formed both a place of habitation for the indigenous Bedouin and a land bridge between northeast Africa and southwest Asia, primarily Egypt and Palestine, enabling socio-cultural, commercial, political, and military interactions between these regions and their populations. During Antiquity, the Sinai can be further subdivided into three main spheres of activity in its northern, southern, and eastern regions.

### **North Sinai:**

The northern Sinai facilitated Egyptian overland traffic, but was also used by the Bedouins and peoples from Syria-Palestine and elsewhere. Egypt frequently used this route, which was called the “Way of Horus,” for military and commercial purposes, maintaining way-stations and dominating Syria-Palestine during the late Predynastic to Dynasty 1 (Early Bronze Age I–II: 3,500–2,900 BCE) and New Kingdom (Late Bronze Age – Iron Age IA: 1550–1150 BCE). The indigenous Bedouin population is attested periodically in the archaeological and textual-pictorial record, including a peak in seasonal campsites during the Early Bronze I and IV periods, especially focusing in northern Sinai; a Shasu Bedouin uprising is noted throughout northern Sinai during the reign of Sety I (13<sup>th</sup> century BCE), encouraging the fortification of Egyptian way-stations across this region. During Dynasties 19–20, Egypt added and maintained an impressive series of forts, magazines, silos, and water reservoirs across this region, both securing this coastal route and enabling the passage of troops during campaigns into Syria-Palestine. In later periods, this coastal route enabled overland invasions by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Macedonians, whilst the Ptolemies and Romans used it for various campaigns into Palestine and to secure Egypt’s eastern frontier and diverse state and commercial traffic. North Sinai also formed a pilgrim route in Roman and later periods, both for persons following the flight of the holy family into Egypt, and as a secondary route for others heading to various holy sites in South Sinai.

### **South Sinai:**

South Sinai contained copper and turquoise, the latter of which provided the nearest source of this semi-precious stone throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East. Turquoise was apparently obtained initially by indigenous Bedouin during the Chalcolithic through Early Bronze Age II, with minimal contact with Egypt being attested by 1% late Predynastic-Dynasty 1 pottery at a dozen campsites in South Sinai; these Bedouin sites, including additional Bedouin and Canaanite sites and circular stone tombs (nawamis) in southeast Sinai, display greater ties with the EB II city of Arad in the northern Negev. Despite textual attestations to a Bedouin presence throughout South Sinai during the pharaonic and later periods, archaeological surveys have uncovered only traces of a few seasonal campsites in South Sinai during Early Bronze Age IV (Egypt’s late Old Kingdom through First Intermediate Period: 2300–2040 BCE). Otherwise, Egypt dispatched mining expeditions directly to South Sinai in the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms (EB III: 2,900–2,300 BCE; MB IIA-B: 2040–1650 BCE; LB-Iron IA: 1550–1150 BCE), during which it established two-three anchorages in Markha Plain, including a late Old Kingdom fort at Ras Budran, various camps and mines at Wadi Maghara, Wadi

Kharig, and Serabit el-Khadim, and a Middle-New Kingdom temple to Hathor (“Mistress of the Turquoise”) and Sopdu (“Lord of the East”) at Serabit el-Khadim. Aside from minimal Hyksos period (MB IIC: 1650–1550 BCE) scarabs and pottery, Late Period (Iron Age – Persian period: 715–332 BCE) amulets, and Roman potsherds at Serabit el-Khadim and its environs, surveys have yielded minimal traces of later activity in this part of South Sinai. However, Egyptian and other textual-pictorial sources refer to indigenous Asiatics aiding Egyptian miners during the Middle-New Kingdoms. Regarding the Hebrew Exodus and sojourn accounts in Sinai, which are most commonly dated to Dynasty 19, both the Egyptian and archaeological evidence remain silent. The western coastal passage from Kom el-Qolzoum (Suez) to Mount Sinai formed a secondary route for Christian and Jewish pilgrims visiting this region (e.g., Elgeria’s travels).

### **East Sinai (Negev):**

Eastern Sinai, including the Negev, held further copper sources and enabled military and mercantile passage between Southwest Palestine and the Gulf of Elat, the latter of which enabled commerce with the Red Sea. The Neolithic occupation in the Negev (6,000-4,300 BCE) included nomadic hunter-gatherers who resided in seasonal campsites with a few shrines (Biqat Uvda) and hunting installations (“desert kites”). Chalcolithic populations expanded in marginal regions, including the northern Negev, adopting subterranean cave housing (e.g., Beer-Sheba; Shiqmim) and exploiting copper sources in Wadi Faynan; copper ores from this region appear at Maadi in northeast Egypt. Settlement peaks in the northern Negev in EB II, during which strong ties existed between the material culture at Arad and from sites in South Sinai. After a decline in settlement in EB III, occupation peaks in the central Negev during EB IV, with small to large campsites and adjacent tumuli tombs appearing in the Negev hill country. During the Middle through Late Bronze Age, most visible remains of indigenous Bedouin campsites disappear from the Negev; their presence survives mostly via Egyptian references to various interactions and conflicts with the Shasu-Bedu and Canaanites in the Sinai, or through the presence of Negevite and Canaanite pottery at Egyptian dominated copper mining and processing sites in the southern Negev (e.g., Egyptian Hathor shrine at Timna). Ain Qudeirat (“Kadesh-Barnea”) and Arad Valley, which are often equated with the Israelite conquest and stopover in the central Negev, have yet to yield LB-Iron IA materials. Instead, this region is better known for Iron Age II fortifications. Despite the well-attested Iron IIA (1000-945 BCE) Israelite fortifications in the central Negev highlands, the existence of a “Solomonic” harbor at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion-Geber?), on the Gulf of Elat, remains unproven. In contrast, this Red Sea coastal fort has produced several phases (IV-I) spanning an initial undated phase (late 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE?) through the later Iron Age. The Egyptian pharaoh, Sheshonq I (biblical Shishak) may have destroyed some of these forts during his ca. 925 BCE Levantine campaign, while later fortifications within this region either fell to or were re-occupied by the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires. In the late Roman and subsequent periods, the Negev formed the prime pilgrimage route from Jerusalem to Mount Sinai.

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